



U.S. AIR FORCE

This Week in USAF and PACAF History **10-16 August 2009**



13 August 1940 **EAGLE DAY** in the **BATTLE OF BRITAIN**. The German Luftwaffe began a systematic and sustained air campaign to destroy the Royal Air Force (RAF) so that a cross-channel invasion of Great Britain would be practical. Also known as Eagle Day, this date marked the beginning of the Battle of Britain, the first large-scale modern air battle and the first air battle to determine the outcome of a war. The Royal Air Force victory in this battle kept England in the war by denying Germany the air supremacy needed to invade the British Isles. The RAF triumph also allowed the UK to rebuild its military forces after the defeat on the continent, laid the foundation for Allied air supremacy over Europe, and preserved England as the Allied base from which the liberation of Western Europe was launched.

While the heroism of the British aircrews is often cited, there were many unsung heroes among British leaders, air and civil defense workers and in their aircraft industry. The Germans had more resources at their disposal, but the Luftwaffe failed to win the battle of attrition with the RAF. British commanders such as Air Chief Marshall Hugh Dowding and Air Vice Marshall Keith Park shrewdly conserved their fighter forces for attacks on German bomber formations. The British Minister of Aircraft Production, Lord Maxwell Beaverbrook, simplified and accelerated British fighter production to stay ahead of RAF losses during the critical summer months of 1940. Dowding also refined the British air defense network of radar stations, observation posts and radio listening stations, linking them to communications and command structures in the world's first modern integrated air defense system.



The British were also aided by German mistakes. Luftwaffe problems included ineffective intelligence and inconsistent strategies to destroy the RAF and the British air defense system, and aircraft that lacked the range, endurance or payload necessary to destroy British airfields and air defense sites.

Some historians maintain that the Royal Navy could have stopped a German invasion in any case. However, Luftwaffe bombers had great success against British ships in the Mediterranean, and they would likely have enjoyed the same success in the English Channel if they had achieved air superiority in the Battle of Britain.

If the Germans had forced Britain out of the war, then the Battle of the Atlantic, the Combined Bomber Offensive and the D-Day invasion at Normandy would never have happened. With Nazi resources released from the western front and no need for a North African campaign, there would likely have been a very different conclusion to the German invasion of Russia. Indeed, the war in Europe might have been over by the time of the Pearl Harbor attack, and the rest of World War II might have been limited to the Pacific theater.





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15 August 1943 The **Aleutian Campaign ended** with the reoccupation of Kiska. The Japanese occupied Aleutian islands to secure the northern flank of their Pacific empire, and the U.S. feared that the islands could be bases for air attacks on the American west coast. In May 1943, American forces seized Attu, and by July the USAAF began using it as a base for raids against the Kurile Islands. When U.S. troops invaded Kiska on August 15th, they found the



enemy had already given up the outpost. Primarily an air war, the Aleutian Campaign was the only World War II campaign fought on North American soil. (At right, a Japanese ship burns in Kiska harbor after an 11th Air Force raid.)

10 August 1944: U.S. forces overcame Japanese resistance on Guam, allowing **construction of B-29 bomber bases** on three of the Mariana Islands—Guam, Tinian, and Saipan.

14 August 1945 The 20th Air Force conducted the **final B-29 combat mission against Japan**.



This mission included a record number of effective aircraft: 754 B-29s and 169 fighters. One phase of the mission, against Tsuchizaka, produced the longest unstaged mission (3,650 miles) of the war from the Marianas. (Photos of B-29s over Japan.)



15 August 1945 **VICTORY DAY —JAPAN**. After U.S. atomic bombs struck Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the Japanese government announced it would surrender "unconditionally," subject to an Allied agreement to maintain the monarchy. Washington declared a cease-fire immediately.

12 August 1946 **President Truman** signed a bill authorizing an appropriation of \$50,000 to establish a **National Air Museum** in the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, D.C. The small museum became the **National Air and Space Museum** - the most visited museum in the world.

10 August 1950: President Truman mobilized the first two **Air Force Reserve** units were mobilized for Korean War service. By 1953 all 25 Reserve flying wings had been mobilized.

16 August 1950 **Massed bomber mission in Korea**. In the largest employment of air power in direct support of ground forces since the Normandy invasion of World War II, 98 B-29s dropped more than 800 tons of 500-pound bombs on a 27-square-mile area near Waegwan, where large numbers of enemy troops were suspected to be massing for an attack on Taegu.



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15 August 1957 **General Nathan F. Twining** became the first USAF officer to serve as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. During World War II, General Twining was the Commander of 13th Air Force and Chief of Staff of Allied Air Forces in the South Pacific. Later in the war, he commanded 15th Air Force in Europe and then 20th Air Force in the final strategic bombing campaign against Japan, including the atomic bomb missions. In 1947, he assumed command of Alaskan Air Command. General Twining was the Chief of Staff of the Air Force prior to being appointed as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Twining was known for his belief in strategic bombing, his common sense and his ability to work well with other officers across the DoD.

11-12 August 1958 Torrential rain over northern Honshu, Japan, raised the Iwaki-Gawa River over its banks and flooded the city of Hirosaki. Fierce currents prevented the use of rescue boats, so city officials asked **Misawa Air Base's 6139th Air Base Group**, stationed about 80 miles to the east, for help. In a series of flights, the 6139th H-19s airlifted 133 passengers, saving stranded flood victims by cable from roofs, bridges, vehicles, trees, and islands of higher ground and transporting them to relief centers.

10 August 1961: An F-105 lifted the **largest load ever carried aloft by a single-engine aircraft** in dropping over seven tons of conventional bombs on a target. (F-105 photo below.)





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14 August 1964 The **first combat employment of the F-105D** in Southeast Asia involved 36th Tactical Fighter Squadron aircraft from Korat RTAFB.

15 August 1972 **Operation SAKLOLO concluded.** Since 21 July, Pacific Air Forces had airlifted more than 2,000 tons of food, medical supplies, clothing, fuel, and other relief supplies to Luzon for the relief of flood victims in the Philippines. C-130s as well as H-3 and H-43 helicopters transported more than 1,500 passengers, including disaster-assistance relief teams and medical evacuees.

14 August 1973 The **Bellows Air Force Station beach area** was entered into the National Register of Historic Places because of significant archaeological findings, which determined it to be one of the oldest places of human habitation in the Hawaiian Islands. Sociological and scientific studies, including analyses of radiocarbon dating, suggest that Bellows beach area was occupied around A.D. 800 to 1000.

